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ABSTRACT

This document consists of a description of the Apprenticeship Linkage Program, serving the greater Bloomington, Indiana, area, and a report of a qualitative research study of that program. The program, which was intended to prepare single parents and homemakers to become qualified applicants for apprenticeship training programs, consisted of 30 hours of classroom experience over an 11-week period. Phase I of the experience was devoted to individual assessment, career decision making, apprenticeship and skilled trade information, and discussions on issues women face working in a male environment. Phase II included actual vocational education classes. The program description provides information on the development of the program, including its four components (life skills, career development, vocational education, and preapprenticeship) that constitute the services and activities offered; formal recruitment efforts; efforts to forge linkages between participants and professionals and community services providers; program funding; and the advantages of focusing on community, not university, resources. The explanation of the research methodology of the qualitative study includes a list of the procedures implemented to ensure credibility of the case study. The results of the study appear in a section called Respondents' Constructions. The document concludes with short descriptions of the authors. (CML)

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ENHANCING WOMEN'S ACCESS TO THE SKILLED TRADES

A Paper Presented To

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes an Apprenticeship Linkage Program designed to help women enter into and receive preapprentice training for nontraditional careers. The descriptive portion outlines key features of the program while the qualitative study report notes the constructions of women in the program about their early life and its relationship to career decisions and their participation in the program.

This paper will describe an Apprenticeship Linkage Program designed to serve women pursuing nontraditional career training and provide a description of the participants' constructions developed through the naturalist inquiry method.

The Apprenticeship Linkage Program

The goal of the Apprenticeship Linkage Program was to prepare single parents and homemakers to become qualified applicants for apprenticeship training programs. Before actual services were implemented, research was done to document the feasibility of women in particular trades and the needs of single parents and homemakers pursuing nontraditional employment. In meeting with apprenticeship program personnel, single parents and homemakers, vocational educators, and service providers working with this target population, several issues emerged. These issues gradually fell into categories which were reflected in the model. The model was designed to graphically depict the services and activities needed to prepare women for the skilled trades.

The model, a compilation of components vital to single parents pursuing apprenticeable occupations, consisted of four categories. The categories (a) life skills, (b) career development, (c) vocational education, and (d) preapprenticeship were all intervoven into a complex package of services. Counseling, through a single parent and homemaker project, provided the integration of services for each individual, assuring smooth transition in making timely decisions while gaining invaluable

knowledge and skills. Each component is described below, identifying the needs and services available.

Life skills. Life skills were defined as the responsibilities that a single parent encountered while raising a family, managing a home, and pursuing a career. Handling the financial needs of a family, as well as the emotional needs of a family, often became difficult for the single parent. A key factor in the success of a single parent reaching her career goal was stability of the family unit. Counseling and ongoing support assisted the single parent in integrating the family needs, the day to day home management responsibilities, the individual's personal needs, and the individual's needs as they related to a career choice.

Career development. Career development was defined as a series of decisions necessary to explore and choose a particular career. One of the key factors mentioned by women during the initial research process was the lack of information about nontraditional careers. The career development activities provided an information base, as well as guidance in determining the kind of employment that was realistic, given the individual's personal strengths and overall situation.

Vocational education. This component was perhaps the most structured of all since particular occupations require specific qualifications. The educational needs of the single parent ranged from basic skills to actual core knowledge of particular occupations, depending on the educational background of the individual. The vocational education system provided an expanded array of occupational education services in conjunction with educational skills testing. The combined efforts of the single parent and homemaker project and the educational counselors assisted the program

participants in the process of fulfilling educational requirements.

Preapprenticeship. Preapprenticeship was defined as any activity that strengthened the single parent both personally and professionally. These activities provided the missing link for women in understanding the issues surrounding nontraditional employment. Nontraditional employment for anyone, male or female, necessitates an awareness of harassment, discrimination, and employee rights, issues, as well as, specific job requirements and responsibilities. Preapprenticeship activities included assistance in understanding how her career choice affected her personally, and assistance with educational and/or experiential activities that enhanced her understanding and selection of a particular trade. This integration involved coordination of efforts of agencies already providing services and exploration of possibilities for program expansion.

In summary, the model depicted a flow of activities from initial assessments (of personal strengths, skills, and aptitudes) to actual vocational education courses. The activities fell into a life skills path and a career path. The ongoing support of counseling throughout the flow of activities was a key factor in helping single parents maintain a balance between personal and career oriented responsibilities. Another key factor was the ongoing coordination of services. The Apprenticeship Linkage Program provided the integration of all the activities, keeping in mind the needs of the program participants and their individual goals.

Program Implementation

The next step in program implementation (after developing the model) was to create a mechanism for provision of services. Services needed to be provided in a sequence that would build on individuals' progress, as well

as, incorporate a means of building a supportive environment for participants to share and grow together. Individual sessions were necessary to monitor individual needs and progress. The final form for delivery of service was a 30 hour classroom experience over an 11 week period. The class was divided into two phases. Phase I was the initial 11 week course including individual assessment, career decision-making, apprenticeship and skilled trade information, and discussions on issues women face working in a male environment. The second phase, Phase II, included actual vocational education classes. This phase was necessary to prepare the class members academically for specific career choices. The counseling component continued throughout Phase II to provide continuity of support. Individual counseling sessions were scheduled upon request during Phase II. Group sessions were scheduled monthly.

Recruitment for the class was quite formal. Individuals were originally identified during two workshops presenting information about women in the skilled trades. Workshop participants were notified of the class and asked to respond if they were interested. An interview was then scheduled with two staff members involved with the class. The interview gave staff a chance to explain the class, what was expected of participants, as well as gain more information about individual needs and possible career choices. It also gave the individual a chance to check out the staff to make sure they felt comfortable with the structure and goals of the class. Interviewees were instructed to come to the first class, if they were still interested after interviewing with staff.

Out of 40 women identified through workshops, 18 were interviewed individually to explain the program, its purpose, and to solicit their

individual input for further information needed in the classes. Specific requirements for class participation included openness to personal exploration, a desire to learn more about the skilled trades and a commitment to attend all of the classes. Out of the 18 interviewed, 15 were able to make the commitment to the class. Scheduling and other personal responsibilities contributed to five not being able to complete Phase I of the course. Apprenticeship Linkage Program staff agreed to work with these individuals on a one-on-one basis. Below are the statistics of the 10 women who completed Phase I.

(a) Trades chosen:

2 carpentry
2 electrician
1 tool and die maker
1 drafter
1 telephone installation
1 horticulturalist
2 undecided

(b) Job placement: (as opposed to additional training)

1 telephone installation
1 landscape/horticulture

(c) Entered Phase II: (additional training)

3 math classes
1 residential wiring
1 CAD training
2 blueprint reading

The class was purposely designed to meet over an 11 week period. Weekly meetings were scheduled with individuals responsible for other activities between class meetings. This set up allowed individuals to digest information from week to week, as well as lessened the amount of time that they were away from their families.

The 11 weeks also provided an opportunity for class members to experience ongoing support from other women facing the same changes and decisions. While some women had support systems outside of the class, the class provided an impartial, nonemotional, nonthreatening atmosphere for class members to talk, listen, and grow without defending or explaining their feelings, new knowledge or eventual decisions.

Key Linkages

A second major objective of the project was to develop vital linkages with key people and organizations affecting the single parents' goals. Therefore, many professionals were asked to be involved with the classroom experience. Apprenticeship Linkage Program staff organized the sequence of activities, taught some classes, and scheduled appropriate professionals for other topics being discussed. Professionals included tradeswomen from various occupations, experts on affirmative action and discrimination issues, counselors trained as group facilitators and individual counselors and professionals knowledgeable in career exploration and decision-making activities.

The class was therefore taught as a team. Each professional was asked to focus on how their particular expertise related to single parents pursuing nontraditional careers. Class members in turn, were asked to respond to (1) the information provided, (2) how the information affected their decision to continue, and (3) how the information affected their decision to change their career choice. The involvement with professionals also provided good contacts for program participants after program completion.

During development and implementation of the model, service providers were also interviewed on an ongoing basis. When actual participant needs were identified, service providers were identified and asked to provide and/or consider expanding their services to meet specific needs. These services included: child care assistance programs; housing assistance; financial aid for rent, tuition, and transportation costs; educational assessment; mechanical skills assessment; tutoring, employment and training services; vocational education services, etc. Working agreements with each of these service areas speaks to the community's investment in assisting individuals who want to make new choices and better their employment and ultimately their ability to care for their family.

Financial Resources

Some of the enticement of completing Phase I of the class was a promise of two vocational education courses, free to participants. Participants were also provided transportation and child care assistance while attending educational training sessions. The tuition and transportation monies were available through Carl Perkins money. The child care was a combination of Title XX and WIN Program monies. Some tuition money was also available through Pell Grants and/or Indiana State Grants.

Advantages

Much of the success of the coordination efforts available through this project can be attributed to the initial regional focus of the project. While it was housed at Indiana University, staff generated interest by focusing on using community resources to meet specific needs of particular individuals. With this kind of emphasis everyone had ownership and therefore were willing to work with the group and the individuals during

the transition of choosing and beginning a new career.

A Qualitative Study Drawn From The Program

Description of Methodology

The decision process used in selecting naturalistic inquiry had many considerations. The inquiry team expressed a genuine interest in gaining some understanding of the constructions of the women in the preapprenticeship program. They also were curious of the issues and concerns they may have shared as a group. It was felt that interviews based on the Hermanuetic Circle approach would yield some insights into the particular constructions of this group of women. There has been no attempt on the part of the inquiry team to generalize these findings to any other population.

There was a concern about whether the respondents would feel comfortable during interviews, having only been briefly introduced by the project coordinator. Because group members shared very positive experiences and they were anxious to see the program continue, they were eager to participate in the inquiry process. They volunteered and were articulate, speaking frankly and openly about their experiences, and were poised and relaxed in their presentations. They all reported positive feelings for the attention and direction given by the project coordinator and her staff, and this factor no doubt carried over into the inquiry team meetings. A number of them also seemed to use the interviews as an additional personal test to again prove to themselves they were succeeding.

The respondents were given assurances of confidentiality but none of them chose to use a psuedoname. In fact, most of them were eager to provide personal endorsements of their experiences in the project. Each agreed to give permission to be recorded though none were, and to have the project coordinator share observations and other information with the inquiry team. Again these opportunities were viewed as further validation of their successes. The inquiries were given opportunities for member checks after each interview.

The project coordinator offered information that seemed to be consistent with the constructions reported by the respondents. In addition, the staff reported observing subtle reactions and interactions, body language and other signs of change, again showing consistency with the self-reports of respondents.

After each interview, entries were made in the form of brief notes and later recorded by individual units onto 3 X 5 cards. Interviews were begun with an open-ended format, and subsequent conversations were guided by the emerging issues and concerns. The Hermanuetic circle process seemed to be an effective way to probe for the shared constructions of the respondents.

The inquiry team kept a reflexive journal during the process, reflecting on the feelings and questions being considered. This portion of the documentation has proven to be a crucial part of the entire process.

In addition, notes from the conversations with the project staff were recorded.

One of the most difficult tasks of the inquiry was the actual operationalization of the wealth of material we were able to collect. The difficult decision proved to solve itself as the joint constructions became

more and more evident. This commonality of the inquiries seemed to come through loud and clear in the material we had gathered, but again we were cautious to avoid any generalizations to other groups.

The following procedures were implemented to address the credibility and trustworthiness of the case study.

1. Extensive interviews were conducted with the participants. Interviews were held with the instructors of the project as well. All interviews began with an open-ended format and the focus was narrowed as constructions began emerging from the data. The interviews were held in informal settings chosen by the respondents, generally a fast food establishment in their neighborhoods.

2. Observations of the respondents in a variety of settings and situations were recorded. Some of the most valuable observations were interactions observed by the instructors when the respondents interacted with one another and if family members or significant others provided transportation for the women to the sessions. Observations seemed to be consistent with the emerging constructions the respondents discussed.

3. Peer debriefing consisted of discussing some questions and concerns as they developed with a colleague from another clinical setting. The peer was able to help to clarify portions of the respondents' constructions that were understood but not articulated to a reader or listener as clearly as possible. The peer also was helpful in the struggle to keep a priori theories about the respondents' situations and the interviewers' clinical background from entering into the thinking and understanding of the respondents' emic views. The peer debriefing proved to be a vital contribution to let the constructions of the respondents emerge as intended, given the nature of this inquiry.

4. Confirmability was addressed by maintaining the following in regard to the information collected: (a) field notes kept in a journal, (b) reflexive journal of the interviewer, (c) access to reflexive notes of instructor of the project, (d) coding system of the separate units of information.

When interviews with respondents were finished, corrections and revisions were made, adding information from member checks and interviewer

recollections. Original units were numbered onto cards and in the original field notes.

A process of categorizing and defining groups made arrangements into emergent and useful groups possible. Case study consent forms were used. Final member checks were offered the respondents, and they were given the opportunity to review the information gathered and to offer suggestions and revisions.

Respondents' Constructions

Bloomington Indiana, the home of Indiana University, is perceived by most people outside of the state as a fine college town serving a community of over 30,000 students who are heading towards professional careers. The traditional roles of women and men in the settings of pre-law, pre-dent, pre-med and the disciplines of science as well as professional schools in business and education are blurred. There is increasing equality and optimism about it.

There is another community surrounding the Bloomington area composed of people struggling on the lower rungs of the economic ladder to survive. Many of these people work in local factory jobs, small farms, or service businesses. Here, traditional roles are deeply embedded in the folkways of the people of the community. For most of these people, particularly women, acceptance of their station in life occurs almost without challenge. And, those women who do challenge the traditional view find little support for their ideas.

This story, however, is about a group of women who were brought up in this dysfunctional environment and sought to change their lives. It provides insight into their constructions of reality and how their efforts

over time to confront those dysfunctional features of their background are leading them to new and optimistically viewed careers.

Beginning the cycle. Family and school played a significant role in the early development of the respondents. The role of girls to be mates and child rearers was beyond question. It was simply the goal these girls were suppose to have. It was their purpose in life. This view was supported by family members, teachers, friends, and classmates. The support the respondents received was positive if consistent with traditional goals but negative if the respondents deviated. It was alright, for example, to be enthusiastic about school in the elementary grades but academic performance and exploration of career ideas was of little value in the high school. There was no support or permission to pursue nontraditional careers. Behaviors that appeared to be tom-boyish were tolerated but not endorsed in the early grades and were unacceptable behavior by later years.

One might conclude from this broadly accepted goal that the role model of mother and wife in the family was strong. For these respondents that assumption was wholly false. Their mothers lead dysfunctional lives in which they were frequently adjusting to traumatic family situations and encounters which diminished their self-esteem. These were not loving, warm, supporting home environments.

And, while the home environment may have been better for some of their brothers and sisters, it was more dysfunctional for the respondents because they showed early signs of being different. Little wonder then that a wide array of aggressive alienated behaviors began to develop at a rather early age, such as truancy, drugs, alcohol, and poor academic performance.

Father figures were not always present and when they were there was little loving support.

However, uniquely and uniformly there was a dominant male figure in the lives of all respondents. In most cases it was a grandfather. The respondents as little girls were the darlings of these male figures. As grandfather or others worked in their wood shops or garages or in neighbors' houses, the little girls were present to serve as helpers. The interaction between these older male models and the little girls was positive. They not only enjoyed the activity but began to assimilate important values such as the needs to be productive, perfectionistic, creative, and persistent. They also learned that work was worthy of doing and enjoyable.

Imagine the years accumulating in which the one person they admired and received recognition and acceptance from was a male performing male traditional work. Family members, teachers and school chums rejected these interests. The early development of low self-esteem was in process.

Continuing the cycle. All married, all divorced, all but one had children and the marriages were to men of very traditional values, dominant, controlling, and aggressive. In all cases, the new families were not elevated in economic or social status. These early marriages were simply a continuation of nonsupportive systems and dysfunctional relationships which had characterized the youth of the respondents. The respondents' low self-esteem continued to develop and nonproductive behaviors such as addiction became more deeply embedded.

Divorce ruined what little economic stability the women had in life. Their new lives dealt more with survival than growth. There seemed to be

few options available to them.

Breaking the cycle. Participation in the program had to be initiated by the respondents. That is, it was their initiative and follow through that got them into the program. Several factors best describe this state of readiness. First, all respondents were grasping for an opportunity to change their plight in life. Second, the focus on apprenticeship in nontraditional career programs touched an important positive aspect of their childhood and it was consistent with their need to work. Third, all of the respondents were examining their lives introspectively, though in most cases informally, to see how they could make things better.

Initially, it was the theme of acquiring training for these unique careers that were attractive. However, in a short time the group congealed and became a support group for all. For one of the first times in their lives they realized there were other women who had interests in nontraditional careers and their life experiences although not identical were parallel in many respects. Thus, there was the worthy opportunity of surviving by participating and surviving with people who understood their own perspectives.

A number of the personal qualities that had been developed over the years emerged in a new and positive form. For example, perfectionism was a quality greatly admired but it was a characteristic that had often given them trouble by feeding negatively into the already low self-esteem. Now they see performance in more relative terms where they are willing to accept measures of their success along the way. Second, individuals in the group were clearly survivors. They had persisted through a large number of life shattering experiences. Yet they always found a way to stay alive and

help their kids. But their surviving was reactive as opposed to proactive. As a result of the program proactive measures have been taken by all. For example, Dee has just completed her second algebra class, both with "As" at the college level. This same person, as an adolescent, failed algebra. Overcoming this failure was critical for her because it was the major evidence that all the people who put her down were right. Others have taken new jobs and still others have continued in training programs leading to new jobs. One person has gone into business for herself.

Self-esteem has also been an issue addressed by all of the respondents and headway can be seen among them all by outside people as well as by themselves. For example, Rose described herself as too shy to look at people at work, which she thought was the reason she didn't have any friends. She worked on this behavior and now has a group of friends at work and is viewed by her cohorts as a friendly person. She regularly has coffee breaks with fellow workers. Improvements in self-esteem can also be noted in the way respondents dress and talk, particularly about themselves. Relationships have been strengthened and goals are seen more clearly and they are now attainable.

The need to prove oneself in nontraditional career areas seems to be connected to the positive experiences of childhood, the accumulated rejection of early ideas, and development to dysfunctional self-concepts. It may well be, that in the end, nontraditional careers will not be the employment area of all of the respondents. But in the interim it was the focal point of their motivation. Additionally, the work activities of those nontraditional careers continue to match well with the major constructs of the respondents regarding the need to be productive, the

desire to see real products or accomplishments, and the need to be creative with materials and processes as a means of self-expression.

The respondents' involvement in the formal higher education system was seen by them as evidence of personal growth. They all had been intimidated by the educational system. Their comfort with formal education increased dramatically. It represented new values, new directions, assumption of responsibility, an increased sense of personal worth, and a connection between what they wanted and their ability to achieve it.

The program provided the catalyst for two events to occur simultaneously: for people to explore deep seeded interests, or at minimum, long held fantasies about work that they thought would be positive in their life and for addressing real issues in their personal lives regarding self-esteem, decision authority, and proactive measures to affect their lives. Through its leadership and membership the program provided a critical support system for undertaking these tasks.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Amy N. Sutley — Ms. Sutley developed the program and provided the training and group leadership services described in the paper. She is employed by Vocational Education Services, an information center at Indiana University, as a Research Assistant.

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